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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 004225

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [IR](#) [PTER](#) [FR](#)
SUBJECT: (C) PESSIMISTIC ELYSEE LINE ON LEBANON/SYRIA
DEVELOPMENTS

REF: A. PARIS 4175

[1](#)B. PARIS 4173

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Chirac's Middle East advisor Dominique Boche recently shared a pessimistic assessment of Lebanon/Syria developments, criticizing UNSYG Annan's passivity on the issue, and citing the potential for the Lebanese government to collapse, amid internal divisions and active undermining by Hizballah and others. Boche stressed the need for Lebanon to get through the summer months peacefully, but viewed the GoL's reform effort as "buried." Boche assessed that one way to reverse Lebanon's fortunes could be a breakthrough with Iran on the nuclear issue, and concluded that an Iran engaged in negotiations might adopt a more constructive stance in Lebanon. As for Syria, Boche viewed the Asad regime as increasingly isolated in the Arab world due to its alliance with Iran and facing a more restive, but still nationalistic population. At the same time, he assessed that the international community should be more active responding to human rights abuses in Syria and conceded that France had ignored the issue for too long. End comment.

[1](#)2. (C) During a June 15 discussion on the Chirac-Olmert meeting (ref B), Presidential Advisor for the Middle East/Americas Dominique Boche offered a brief, but generally pessimistic assessment of Lebanon/Syria-related developments. Boche offered a mixed response to the recent Brammertz report, noting positively that UNIIIC was making significant progress, and commending the possible linkage between the Hariri assassination and the 14 other bombings/attempted assassinations. On the other hand, Boche described as "regrettable" the report's observation that Hariri's assassination might have been the result of internal tensions within Lebanon. Boche had harsher words for UNSYG Kofi Annan, whom he described as seeking to leave the UN "on good terms," and therefore inactive on the Syria/Lebanon account. Boche reported that when UNSYG Envoy Terje Roed-Larsen had recently approached Annan on the need for Larsen to visit Damascus to press the Syrians on UNSCR 1680 and UNSCR 1559 implementation, the SYG said that he had taken no decision, and that he might undertake the visit himself. Boche assessed that if nothing happened after adoption of UNSCR 1680, Syria would view the resolution as having no consequence and would be emboldened in its efforts to block the Lebanese government.

[1](#)3. (C) As for the GoL, Boche viewed the March 14 movement as weak and divided, with obstacles on all sides and the collapse of the government remaining a real possibility. Boche assessed that Hizballah might seek to hasten the fall of the GoL, given its continued status as an "Iranian-Syrian

joint venture." Boche described the behavior of Michel Aoun as similarly disturbing and undermining GoL stability. Asked about divisions between PM Siniora and Sa'ad Hariri, Boche made no attempt to paper over their differences, and instead criticized Siniora's June 9 letter to Bashar al-Asad on the anniversary of his father's death, which Boche viewed as ill-advised and adding to divisions within the March 14 movement. With the GoL in great difficulty, Boche stressed the need for the national dialogue to continue, and for Lebanon to get through the summer months without confrontations. At the same time, he held out little hope for progress, concluding that the prospects for reform in Lebanon were "buried."

¶4. (C) Pressed for options to move forward in Lebanon, Boche assessed that negotiations with Iran on the nuclear issue could have a salutary effect in Lebanon and add to Syria's isolation. He opined that when Iran faced difficulties, it reacted via its regional proxies; therefore, in the event of negotiations on the nuclear issue, Boche hoped that Iran could play a more constructive role in Lebanon, similar to the role it had played in the interim period between the Hariri assassination and Ahmadi-nejad's election as president, during which the GOI pushed Hizballah to participate in Lebanon's June 2005 presidential elections. Boche offered no specifics on what constructive role Iran might play under current circumstances or what might prompt such a shift in Iranian policy.

¶5. (C) On Syria, Boche viewed the Asad regime as more isolated than ever, with Saudi Arabia and other key Arab governments viewing Bashar al-Asad's reinforced ties with Iran as a "treasonous" betrayal of his Arab brethren. Boche described other Arab governments as embittered by Bashar's conduct and now disinclined to undertake mediation efforts on

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his behalf, as seen in Egypt's recent rebuff of a mediation request from Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri. Boche concluded that Egypt, Saudi Arabia and others were waiting for the UNIIIC findings to implicate the SARG, but would do nothing on Syria's behalf, or against it in the interim. Boche viewed the Syrian population as dissatisfied with Syria's increased isolation, but at the same time showing a nationalistic tendency to support their government in the face of outside pressure. He professed little certainty on the impact of external Syrian opposition activities within Syria. He opined that former Vice-President Khaddam had "no credibility" with the Syrian public, though he had potential sympathizers within the Syrian military and security establishment. Boche agreed that the international community should take a more forthright stance on human rights abuses in Syria, and opined that France and others had perhaps ignored the issue too long. He noted that in the case of France, public opinion was much more mobilized on human rights abuses in Tunisia, for example, while there was little media or public outcry on more serious and systematic abuses in Syria. On the latter point, Boche cautioned that he was expressing personal views.

¶6. (C) Comment: Boche's overwhelming pessimism on Lebanon developments contrasts with the more upbeat perspective offered by a Hariri family advisor (ref A) on divisions between Siniora and Sa'ad Hariri and prospects for the GOL to implement reforms. Also disturbing is Boche's suggestion that Iran holds the key to progress in Lebanon, and that the Iranian regime can be counted upon to reverse its long history of undermining Lebanese sovereignty and independence to play a more constructive role. This would suggest that Boche is putting greater stock in external actors' willingness to pressure parties in Lebanon, in this case Hizballah, rather than the capacity of the March 14 movement to work together effectively. End comment.

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